

## SPORTS

### Strong start gives Bradshaw Christian easy win

By Jon Gudel - Sports Editor



Photos by Bryan Higashino - Finally tested for the first time in the postseason, Bradshaw Christian still cruised to a 50-39 win over Head Royce of Oakland to advance to the program's first-ever Northern California Regional final.

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During the pre-game player introductions, each starter on the Bradshaw Christian High School varsity girls basketball team handed a Gatorade bottle to the opposing player from University High of San Francisco as they met at midcourt for a handshake.

That was the only pleasantries Bradshaw offered the rest of the game.

They thoroughly overwhelmed a fifth consecutive playoff opponent, this time using a 19-1 start to dominate University, 62-28, in the quarterfinals of the Division V Northern California Regional.

Playing in front of a standing-room only crowd, Bradshaw equaled its deepest run in the postseason in school history. They reached the semifinals last season before losing to Pinewood.

Bradshaw head coach Mike Ruble believes this year's team is on a different track.

"I think the difference is this year's team is playing good basketball at the right time," he said. "I hope we're not peaking yet. We still have a lot of basketball left in us."

Bradshaw guaranteed itself of at least hosting the first two rounds of NorCals after CIF granted them a second seed in the Division V bracket. That was primarily based on a difficult preseason schedule, along with Bradshaw clinching a third consecutive Sac-Joaquin Section Division V title.

The 34-point rout of University extended Bradshaw's current win streak to 11 straight.

Ruble especially appreciated the extra night at home after traveling to Palo Alto earlier in the week to coach the boys' NorCal Regional opener at Pinewood. Bradshaw was outscored 20-6 in the fourth quarter and eventually lost, 55-42.

After the boys were eliminated, Ruble immediately switched his entire focus to getting the varsity girls to its first-ever NorCal final, scheduled for Saturday at Folsom High School. The state final will be played Mar. 27 at Rabobank Arena in Bakersfield.

"We try to let the girls know that we are proud of them," said Ruble. "But by no means are we satisfied. We still have some more goals that we want to get. We want this journey to continue. I'm not ready for it to end."

Bradshaw extinguished any doubt of a possible quarterfinal upset after scoring 22 of the first 23 points of the game. University, which brought a respectable road crowd considering the two-hour drive and playing on a weeknight, was clearly overmatched from the outset.

Bradshaw scored the first 10 points and did not allow a field goal until 15 seconds into the second quarter.

University managed just one free throw in the first quarter and, despite scoring eight or more points in each of the next three quarters, trailed by as many as 36 points in the second half.

"Our girls come out focused," said Ruble of his team's knack for quick starts. "They come out worried about nothing but that first possession. We just take it quarter by quarter and possession by possession."

Freshman Ashlee Jones, who scored a game-high 20 points in a blowout of Turlock Christian in the section championship game, sank a three-pointer 15 seconds into the game, and Jordie Smith hit another one 40 seconds later. The rout was officially underway.

Bradshaw only outscored University 11-8 through the first seven minutes of the second quarter, but back-to-back three-pointers in the final 53 seconds, including one at the buzzer by Jones, pushed the lead to 36-9 at the half.

"We have a lot of weapons," said Ruble. "Any given night we are willing to share the ball, and we can get points from a lot of different girls."

Bradshaw threatened to enforce the automatic running clock for a 40-point lead, something they had done in each of the four section playoff games. But the lead never climbed above 36.

Injury concerns became the lone worry for Ruble.

Starting point guard Fernandi Espinosa rolled her ankle with 1:39 left in the first quarter and did not return. She spent most of the game sprawled on the bench with ice on her ankle.

Guard Breanna McKenzie, a junior transfer from Amador High School, battled cramps for most of the second half.

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